1: Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1920) 1932
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Kusase

428 *Inheritance of Wife's Property*: All the property which a wife brings with her and everything she earns later at her husband's compound by her own individual labour—by brewing beer, making baskets and pots —on her death goes to her children. If she has no children her father's family will take it, not her husband.[1]

Son's Property: His brother takes it, including any wives. A father may not take a son's widow.

Rites de Passage:

787 844 846 *Birth*: 'When a woman conceives, we consult the soothsayer about it, to find out if she will be delivered easily. When she gives birth, we send a long piece of wood notched in three or four places (according to sex of child) to the woman's mother. The husband may take this himself, or, if he has other children, send it by one of them. This stick is cut through at one of the notches and used for firewood. Three or four days later, her mother will come to visit her daughter, bringing some *dawa dawa*. A woman takes care not to be confined inside a room. She will either go into the yard, or cattle-kraal, or to the *saman* farm. Leaves are spread on the ground for her to bring forth upon. The afterbirth (*zar*)[2] is buried in the compound farm in a pot and covered by another pot. The heads of mother and child are shaved on the day the navel string is cut. That of the child is thrown down in the fowl-house, that of the mother in the *saman* farm. The mother and child are bathed in warm water containing certain leaves. From these leaves the child gets its father's taboos. If a woman is confined in her mother's village, they would not dare to bathe the infant in their medicine. They would send a messenger to her husband, who would then dispatch some one with his medicine to treat his wife properly. Neither the father nor any other male will see the child until its navel string is healed up. When it finally drops off, it is buried where the afterbirth was put. A child is not taken outside until it becomes black, but as soon as the mother is better she may go out and fetch water as usual. Sometimes a soothsayer may say that an infant must be taken outside for the first time by such and such a person. This woman must be a *poato* (i.e. a woman born in the infant's father's town, a clanswoman). Five to six months after birth,

[1] Among the Nankanse, what a woman earns while living with her husband belongs to him. Her private property, however, which she brought with her, belongs to her daughter.

[2] In Nankane, the afterbirth of animals is called *zale*, that of human beings *yala*.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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than the others, all the women must be allocated more or less equal plots for this purpose. Each woman, with the help of her daughters or a daughter-in-law, collects and stores wild herbs and edible leaves, buys condiments and seasonings like salt, pepper, and locust bean balls, sometimes with the proceeds of her own petty trading in the markets, and collects shea nuts for the preparation of shea butter, the most important source of fat and the most prized emollient in the native cuisine, for the use of her own *dug*. If a man gives a penny or twopence to one wife for the purchase of seasonings, he must, either immediately or on subsequent market days, give some money to his other wives for this purpose. If he obtains some meat, he must either distribute it amongst all his wives or give all of it to his senior wife to use or preserve for the benefit of the whole family. Only a wife in childbed is entitled to have extra luxuries, which it is the duty of her husband to provide.

Though each woman cooks for herself with an eye to the feeding of her own children and her husband, in the first place, co-wives are obliged to share food prepared with grain from the common supply. In times of plenty, if all the wives of a man have cooked a meal, each woman dishes out a portion of porridge and the accompanying relish for her husband, a portion for herself and her child or children eating with her, and a smaller portion for each of her co-wives. The husband should taste all the dishes sent in to him by his wives, and should pass on to the older children who do not eat with their mothers the dishes he does not want for himself. In times of scarcity a man's wives may cook in rotation for the whole family. But if a woman has a private supply of grain, obtained by trade or from her own relatives, she is entitled to use it for feeding her own children and the husband only; she need not give anything to her co-wives or their children.

In the production and utilization of food-supplies, as this brief sketch shows, the common interests of the *yi* are distinctly paramount. Co-wives co-operate most harmoniously, both among themselves and with the other women of the household, in this sphere of family life. In the organization of productive labour and of the domestic economy, and in the conventions regulating mutual help in this sphere, the dependence on one another of all the members of a household for their sustenance is constantly emphasized. But the relative autonomy of the *dug* is never wholly submerged. The women do not pool the products of their individual labour and enterprise. They do not pool their utensils, and family quarrels sometimes arise because one woman or one woman's child has borrowed and damaged a utensil belonging to another. They keep their firewood supplies, the accumulation of which is one of their most arduous tasks, jealously separate; and they do the same with vegetables and seasonings. There is sometimes friction between co-wives over the use of the grinding-room. But it is significant of the balance usually maintained between the centrifugal tendencies of the *dug* and the

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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house apprised of what is going on in the quarters of the younger women and enabled to exercise benevolent supervision over them.

Her supervision is of special importance when any of the younger women is confined. She sees to it that mother and child are properly attended, that the rites of confinement and of emergence from seclusion are properly performed, that mother and babe are bathed in the prescribed way, and that the mother is given nourishing food. I was passing Ɔmara's homestead one afternoon, about a fortnight after the birth of a child to one of his wives, and called in. The new baby's mother was just coming out of the gateway with an empty water-pot on her head, and I noticed that she was looking far from well. Ɔmara's senior wife, a woman of sterling character, unsoured even by the leprosy that was rapidly getting a hold on her, was sitting outside in the shade. 'Where are you going to?' asked the older woman. 'To the water-hole,' replied her young co-wife. 'Don't go alone,' said the senior wife, 'I'll come with you'; and she rose to accompany the girl. For the first few weeks after the birth of her child a woman must not go about alone outside the homestead. She is still suffering from 'the dreams of a parturient woman (*pɔyarɔyah za'ahug*)'; that is, she is weak and liable to hallucinations or attacks of terror—or, as the natives think of it, to attacks from evil trees and stones—which might drive her mad. That was why the older woman accompanied the young mother. Many such incidents could be quoted in illustration of the concern shown by a senior wife for the welfare of her juniors.

Of course, not all senior wives exercise their role in a wise and unselfish spirit. A woman with an overbearing disposition may make life difficult for her juniors. One result will be that each woman tends to keep strictly to her own *dug* so as to avoid clashing with the senior wife or the other women, and co-operation between co-wives tends to follow the letter of convention rather than the spirit of family unity. Again, there are families in which the senior wife has through age, infirmity, or weakness of character resigned the effective supervision of the household to a younger co-wife, though she still remains the titular senior. But observation shows that on the whole senior wives conform to the pattern we have outlined above. Their position in the family, their responsibilities and privileges, shape them to this pattern.

It must be remembered, also, that the size and stage of development of a family have a great influence on the relations between co-wives. In a family like that of Da'amo'o of Tɔŋ-Dekpieŋ who has but recently set up in his own homestead, there are only three women, two being Da'amo'o's wives and the third his younger brother's wife. They are all young women round about the age of 20, two with an infant each and the other still a maiden (*pɔyasarɔt*). In such a family the differentiation of *dug* from *dug* is rudimentary. The three girls work in co-operation and live together harmoniously like sisters and with no visible distinction

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the family keep an eye on the girl lest she overstrain herself or break one of the dietary taboos. If his father is alive it is he who visits diviners and appeals to the ancestors.

The woman's paternal family, too, are concerned, especially in a first pregnancy. When they have been informed of it, her father appeals to his ancestors to bless her in her coming ordeal, and her mother and sisters bring her gifts of firewood, as her time approaches. It is also her mother's duty, round about the fourth or fifth month, to send one of her co-wives to 'gird the girl with a perineal band (*suol u voog*)', the garb of a matron; for until she has a child a woman wears no genital covering.

The prohibition against giving or accepting bride-price during a woman's pregnancy expresses this general solicitude too. Bride-price transactions involve tension and possible conflict between her father's people and her husband's; and this is not only distressing to her but dangerous to the unborn child. If, for instance, her father, defying convention and the ancestor spirits, as some men are heartless enough to do, takes her from her husband because the bride-price is not paid, the child's legitimate paternity may be prejudiced, as we have noted before, and its health suffer, or the woman herself have a difficult labour.

The solicitude for a woman with child reaches its peak at her confinement and during the subsequent three or four weeks, until she has regained her strength and resumes her normal activities. Many men have described to me their feelings in the hour of a wife's labour. 'You sit listening to her cries and groans of agony. You can't sleep. Your heart is clenched with fear and pity. You do not know how it will end. Do not women die in childbirth or become ill? Do not children die or get injured at birth?' A man's relief and happiness when his wife has passed safely (*salag*) through her confinement is written plainly in his voice and gait. Zan, one of the most morose men I have known, was all smiles and affability on the morning after his wife's confinement. When friends and neighbours congratulate a man on his good luck (*zusɔŋ*, lit. good head) it is as much on account of his wife's safety as on the child's arrival.

During the days of seclusion—three for a boy and four for a girl—and for the next week or so, it is the husband's duty to provide sustaining food and appetizing condiments for his wife. He will go out to fetch large logs for the fire that must be kept going day and night in the woman's room while she and the babe are still weak and liable to catch cold. Every morning he will go out or send someone to collect the leaves and herbs to infuse in the hot water with which mother and child are bathed. And if necessary he will himself carry water from the water-hole or do other services for her comfort that men usually consider to be beneath their dignity.

A confinement also involves extra labour and the dislocation of routine for the womenfolk of the husband's family. The care of the woman and

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the child falls largely on the other women of the household, though the wives of neighbours belonging to the same expanded family, if they are near, might give some help too.[1] The younger women fetch water and cook for her. One of the experienced old women, her mother-in-law or the wife of a neighbour, usually of one of her husband's fellow members of the same inner lineage, supervises and sees to such matters as the bathing of mother and child and the ritual emergence from seclusion of the mother. When she is getting about again, her mother-in-law or senior co-wives must keep a watch over her to see that she does not over-exert herself or go any distance unaccompanied. For as we have mentioned earlier, a woman after childbirth is nervous and may be driven mad by evil trees and stones if she is alone far from home.

These are some of the things a man thinks of when he says that begetting or bearing a child is hard; but they are only the beginning of a father's tribulations. Talking with men immediately after the birth of a child to them, one feels a secret anxiety behind their obvious joy. Many children die in infancy,[2] the Tallensi say, and how can a man know if this particular child will survive? During the first few months of life a child is extremely vulnerable, both physically and mystically. Medicine to keep out evil trees and stones is carefully daubed over the gateway and over every orifice in the homestead wall, and in a circle round the spot where the child lies. *Nɔya teem* ('mouth medicine'), to protect it against malicious praise is given to it. Lucky omens, whether of a conventional or an unconventional kind, are noted. Then, some days after its birth, the child's father or the head of the joint family visits a diviner to find out which of the lineage ancestors is taking it as a spiritual ward (*sɛɣəraan*) to guard its life (*gur u ŋɔvɔr*) and watch over its growth. Only after two to six months from the day of its birth is the child at length allowed out of doors; and then it must be ritually carried out, for the first time, by a clanswoman (*pɔɣayabələg*) of the father's clan (i.e. by a 'female father', *bapɔk*, of the child) chosen by divination, so that the ancestors may bless this important step in its development. And this is not the end of the story, for a father's responsibilities for his children never come to an end, as we shall see presently.

[1] Among the Tallensi, as among many patrilineal peoples, the parturient woman's sisters do not assist at the birth of the child. For, as the natives say, it is not their child. The responsibility of assisting at the birth falls on the wives of the lineage to which the child belongs—women who will later be recognized as its proxy and classificatory mothers. It is one of these women, too, who suckles the child for the first two or three days until the mother's milk begins to flow properly. A parturient woman's mother and sisters bring her gifts of foodstuffs and firewood; and her father also sends her a gift of foodstuffs, guinea-fowls, salt, and other condiments, according to his means. They have nothing to do with the care of mother and child during and after the confinement.

[2] Infant mortality is high—probably about 150–200 per 1,000. Cf. my paper 'A Note on Fertility among the Tallensi of the Gold Coast', *Sociological Review*, vol. xxxv, nos. 3 and 4, 1943.

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843 844 For a woman too, and for any native who is looking at it from the point of view of motherhood, the difficulties of bringing a child into the world centre round pregnancy and labour. Tale women generally seem to take a pregnancy in their stride, especially later pregnancies. They go on with their household tasks until the last minute. Children are sometimes born in the bush, and quite often born outside on the home farm, where the mother has been busy with some task. Miscarriages due to the strain of heavy work such as fetching heavy loads of firewood or going to distant markets to buy grain by the sack, and bringing it home by head carriage are not uncommon among multiparae. Primiparae, as we have seen, are usually watched over by older women, but miscarriages due to overstrain occur among them too. A woman who has had a child is trusted to look after herself.

843 But in spite of their apparently casual attitude to it, women think of pregnancy as fraught with weariness, discomfort, and anxiety. A woman thinks of the purely physiological discomforts such as the attacks of sickness and giddiness she may suffer. She thinks of the circumspection she must use in her eating and drinking. Very thin gruel, cold left-over porridge, sweet potatoes, too much cold water, are all things which would injure her health and must be avoided; nor may she eat honey, else her babe will be born with a catarrhal snuffle. A woman thinks, also, of the increasing lassitude that makes her household tasks more and more burdensome as her term approaches. She remembers the store of firewood she must gather and the provisions she must lay in for her confinement, though it is hard enough to satisfy the current needs of the household. And at the back of her mind she has always the fear of a miscarriage. She is subject, also, to ritual taboos, the most important being the avoidance of funerals.

844 Then, of course, there is the act of giving birth (*dɔɣ*) in the narrow sense. Tale women do not think of it in anticipation with terror or repugnance, but they do associate it with pain and possible complications. The crude midwifery of the old women who assist at a birth, relying in part on magical measures, cannot correct a breech presentation (*tula*) or expel an undescended placenta.

●846 Women always put particular emphasis on the agonies of the hygiene of confinement. Mother and child are subjected to a course of hot baths, douching, and massage which the natives say is extremely painful. A white onlooker finds the process harrowing, to say the least. Water heated to nearly boiling-point is used and medicinal leaves and herbs are infused in it. The infant goes rigid with pain when it is washed in this decoction, and the mother squirms and shrieks as it is sluiced over her body and still tender sexual parts. Massage and oiling with shea butter follow the bath. The treatment is given twice or thrice daily during the days of seclusion and is gradually reduced over the following two or three weeks, fewer baths being given and the temperature of the

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water lowered. Tallensi think it is essential for the health of the mother and babe, and one important item in it is forcing some of the decoction down the babe's throat. Whether or not it actually has a cleansing or invigorating effect must be left to medical judgement. For the native women it has the double significance of an ordeal, and a prescribed treatment that they would not dream of neglecting.

As we have seen, the care of the child on the ritual side falls on its father. The much more exacting physical care of the child in its perilous passage through infancy is its mother's responsibility. This is stressed when Tallensi insist that it is not on account of a magical taboo but because a child is still partly dependent on the breast until it is about three, that sexual intercourse between a man and his nursing wife is discontinued. They say that a child requires the undivided care of its mother until it can run about and eat solid food by itself, and that it will wilt away through lack of nourishment if she conceives prematurely. Nursing mothers become pregnant only too often through lack of self-control, but this is never condoned by public opinion. The only time a Tale woman tries to induce an abortion is when such an accident happens, for no sacrifice is too great to preserve her living child.

When Tale parents are asked what were the special difficulties they had to overcome in rearing their children, they always mention sickness first. Mothers especially have a great dread of sickness in their children. One does not notice this in the easy-going, placid atmosphere of a well-conducted family when there is no 'sleeplessness' (*gogingara*), to use the apt native euphemism for sickness. But one sees it when a child gets ill. Minor ailments throw its mother into a state of anxiety. Serious illness puts her into a panic or prostrates her with grief. She refuses food—which is always regarded by the natives as a sign of severe illness or great emotional distress—and stops all her work. I have seen illness in adolescent or adult children have this effect on women; and the younger the child the more do they suffer.

It is easy to imagine what the death of a child in infancy or childhood means to its mother. A man is expected to control his emotions, but a woman may express her grief freely. A father's grief is palliated, also, by the active role he takes in the ritual by which the emotional shock is neutralized. A woman's part in this ritual is more passive and she feels the blow more acutely in consequence. A mother remains inconsolable for many days and even weeks over the loss of a child.

The way Tallensi think of a mother's grief over the death of her child was brought home to me when Dinkaha's little girl of about three died after a lingering and horrible illness. He had been devoted to the child and was greatly distressed, but in a few days he had accepted the diviner's verdict philosophically and was his old bouncing self again. His wife, on the other hand, broke down completely. Then, a couple of weeks later, news came that an older child of hers by a former husband, with

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a. The tribulations of motherhood: the daily bath and massage of the mother after childbirth

b. The husband's mother and a co-wife of the new mother give her new-born baby its daily bath. The water is so hot that the baby goes rigid with pain

PLATE 9

[facing p. 192]